

GULF COAST MEP BOLSTERS COMMUNITY BY ASSISTING TEXAS SMALL BUSINESS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

ABOUT CONNECT COMMUNITY. Connect Community was created in 2016. A nonprofit community development organization in the Gulfton/Sharpstown neighborhood in Houston, Texas. Its mission is to bring organizations and local residents together to collaborate, align their efforts, and mobilize a broader network of assets to meet needs and strengthen the overall community.

THE CHALLENGE. In May 2020, the Houston region reached record high unemployment rates. Due to the pandemic, the robust manufacturing sector came to a screeching halt, while frontline workers were scurrying to secure limited personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep themselves safe. Connect Community launched the Sewn Goods initiative to quickly mobilize small batch manufacturers and train Houston's Gulfton residents to meet the PPE shortage and keep underemployed workers earning supplemental income.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. For the Sewn Goods collaborative to blossom, Connect Community joined forces with TMAC, part of the MEP National Network™, to get technical assistance with product cost and pricing, supplier sourcing, hiring practices, and operational efficiency. Connect Community provided training to over 100 underserved proprietors, (100% LMI; 76% Hispanic; 75% immigrants and refugee), supported 10 local manufacturers, and produced over 75,000 facemasks. In addition to reinvesting over \$150,000 in Houston, this initiative helped stop the spread of COVID-19. For Gulfton residents, where the per capita income is \$17,647, which is 68% less than the area median income (\$51,140) for Houston and 78% less (\$71,500) than the national median income, having access to supplemental income enabled families to pay monthly rent and avoid eviction. The Sewn Goods initiative motivated residents to create home-based small businesses and empowered existing businesses to scale. These efforts illustrated the need for a hub to upskill residents and provide entrepreneurial support services while also developing a supportive ecosystem for soft goods manufacturers and businesses, and build a more resilient supply chain so that Houston can weather future disasters. While Sewn Goods PPE production continues, Connect Community is establishing the soft goods ecosystem for Houston, and is looking forward to receiving strategic and organizational assistance from TMAC.

"TMAC's assistance to us throughout this endeavor has been invaluable. They helped us connect with entities in Houston that could manufacture masks for us, with suitable and skilled talent who we hired to manage operations, with sewers to join our group and ramp up production, and find material suppliers during initial prototyping phase. They reviewed developed, and improved our cost calculation model; helped develop a dashboard of metrics to scale up; and developed capacity metrics. Finally, they also have provided support for our various grant applications. We are grateful to TMAC for all their assistance."

-Anne Whitlock, Founding Director

RESULTS



211 sewists upskilled



105 jobs supported



75,000 face masks produced,
6832 donated



\$150,000 reinvested in the
community



More than 100 underserved
entities trained

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